BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC STATS Infoline

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highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

Housing

- **BC housing starts finished the year on an upswing, increasing 7.7% (seasonally adjusted) in December.** Starts rose in all but four provinces, with Alberta (+28.6%) leading the way. Nationally, the number of housing starts increased 9.6% between November and December. *Source: Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation*

- **Preliminary data indicate that starts in BC were down almost a third (32.4%) in 1998, falling to 19,800 from 29,400 in 1997.** They were at their lowest level since the mid-1980s, when the number of housing starts also hovered around the 20,000 mark. Starts fell in all but three provinces, decreasing 6.6% nationally. BC's housing market was the weakest in the country, while Alberta (+13.4%) recorded the largest increase. Manitoba (+9.8%) and Saskatchewan (+1.5%) were the only other provinces where the number of housing starts was higher in 1998 than in 1997.
  Source: Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation

- **The value of building permits issued by BC municipalities rose sharply (+34.4%, seasonally adjusted) in November.** Building permits for residential construction projects were up almost fifty percent (+48.7%), while the value of non-residential permits was 17.1% higher than in October. An increase in planned activity in the institutional and industrial sectors was the reason for the upturn.

  BC's 34.4% increase in total building permits was the strongest in the country. Quebec (+17.8%), Ontario (+11.8%) and Nova Scotia (+10.2%) were the only other provinces where the value of building permits rose significantly between October and November. Nationally, building permits were up 8.9%, with advances in both the residential (+12.5%) and non-residential (+4.7%) sectors. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **Despite the improvement in November, the (seasonally adjusted) value of planned construction activity in the province during the first eleven months of 1998 was 10.9% below 1997 levels, largely due to a weak market for new housing.** An 11.2% increase in planned non-residential projects partially offset a 22.1% decline in the value of permits for residential construction. The total value of building permits issued by BC municipalities up to the end of November was $4.5 billion. *Source: Statistics Canada*

- **New house prices in the province's two largest cities continued to decline in November.** The new housing price index (NHPI) for Victoria fell to 6.6% below the November 1997 level, while new homes in the Vancouver area were 4.9% cheaper than a year earlier. The two cities were among only a handful of urban centres which experienced declining new house prices. Nationally, the NHPI was up 0.7%, led by a 6.7% increase in Calgary. Charlottetown (+3.8%), Edmonton (+3.4%) and Regina (+3.3%) had the next-highest price increases.
  Source: Statistics Canada

Mortgage Debt

- **BC accounts for a fifth (20.2%) of total Canadian mortgage debt, but has only 13.1% of the total housing stock.** During the housing boom in the first half of the decade, mortgage credit increased at an average annual rate of 12.5% in BC. However, since 1996, mortgage credit growth has risen by just under 6.0% per year. Credit unions have a large market share, holding more than 20% of the mortgage debt in British Columbia, but banks remain the major

Report **A strong labour market performance for women**

Did you know...

Collisions with animals on roads have resulted in 50 deaths in BC since 1969–an average of two a year. Moose (19) and horses (16) are the animals most often involved in fatal encounters.

lenders, with about three-quarters of the market.
Source: CMHC Housing Facts

The Economy

- **Motor vehicle sales in British Columbia continued to decline in November, falling to 10.5% below the November 1997 level.** Although car sales were up slightly (+2.7%), BC retailers sold fewer trucks and vans (-18.9%). Total vehicle sales fell at double-digit rates in all four western provinces. They were down more than twenty percent in both Saskatchewan (-23.7%) and Alberta (-20.6%). Nationally, sales decreased 5.3%, with fewer vehicles sold in all provinces except Newfoundland (+5.5%) and Quebec (+1.2%).

  Year-to-date, new vehicle sales in the province were 8.9% lower than in the first eleven months of 1997. Sales were also down in Saskatchewan (-11.0%), Manitoba (-7.1%) and PEI (-2.0%), but rose in other parts of the country, increasing 2.5% overall. *Source: Statistics Canada*

Deaths Caused by Animals

- **During the 29 years from 1969 to 1997, 133 people have died in BC as a result of encounters with animals.** Bears, cougars, moose, deer, orca, bees, wasps, other insects, snakes, horses, mules, dogs and cattle have all been implicated in human deaths during this period. Of the 133 deaths since 1969, 66 were caused by domesticated animals, while 67 were due to wild animals. *Source: Vital Statistics Agency, Quarterly Report*

- **At least one person has died as a result of an encounter with an animal in every year since 1969.** The highest annual count was 10, reached in both 1987 and 1992. Horses were responsible for a third (47) of the deaths. After horses, bears (19), and wasps, bees and other insects (16) are the animals most often involved in fatal incidents. Since 1969, there have also been 6 deaths resulting from encounters with cows and steers, 5 caused by bulls, 5 by cougars, and 5 by deer. All but one of the deaths caused by bears was the result of a bear attack, and all of the deaths caused by cougars were the result of attacks. Although bears do not discriminate between their victims (they ranged in age from 5 to 77 years), all of the deaths resulting from cougar attacks involved children. Wildlife management experts speculate that a child's small size, voice pitch, and rapid, sudden movements may mimic the triggers that attract cougars to their animal prey.
Source: Vital Statistics Agency, Quarterly Report

Childhood Asthma

- **The prevalence of childhood asthma has risen sharply since the late 1970s, when only 2.5% of Canadian children younger than 15 were reported to have asthma.** By 1994/95, the incidence had risen to 11.2%, with 672,000 children diagnosed with the disease. It is not known whether the increase in the rate is due to a real increase in the incidence and severity of the disease, or changes in the way physicians diagnose and manage asthma.

  The incidence of childhood asthma is highest in Atlantic Canada (14% in 1994/95) and lowest in the Prairies (10%). Twelve percent of children in Quebec, and 11% of those in both Ontario and BC, were asthmatics. One in nine of these children were admitted to hospital as a result of their asthma. Children were most likely to be hospitalized in the fall (September is the month with the largest number of hospital separations), and least likely to be affected in the summer months (August has the lowest number of separations). Direct and indirect costs of asthma in Canada were estimated to range between $504 and $648 million in 1990.
Source: SC, Health Reports, Winter 1998

Spending on Entertainment

- **In 1996, Canadians spent an estimated $5.8 billion on entertainment services, almost half ($2.8 billion) of it on cablevision rental.** Video rentals ($1.0 billion) were the next largest expenditure item, followed by live staged entertainment ($670 million), movies ($627 million) and live sports events ($401 million).
Source: SC, The Daily

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For data originating from Statistics Canada: data sourced to 'Statistics Canada' has been retrieved from CANSIM, the agency's electronic database; otherwise the source is identified as 'SC' plus the publication name or catalogue number.

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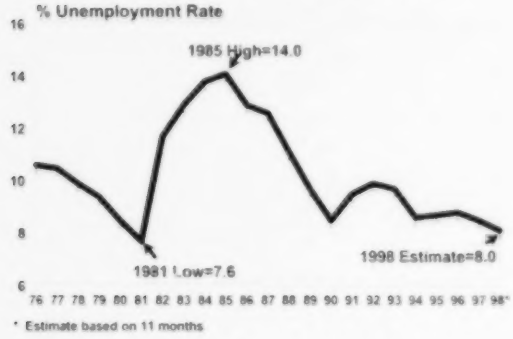
Infoline Report: BC Women Posted a Strong Labour Market Performance in 1998

Contact: Anne Kittredge / (250) 387-0374

Originally published in September 1998 issue, *Earnings & Employment Trends*. Annual subscription: $60 + GST

For women, employment levels have increased by more than 3 per cent in 1998 compared to the previous year. This has resulted in a drop in their unemployment rate by almost one-half a percentage point from 8.4 per cent (which was already a relatively low unemployment rate for women) to 8.0 percent.

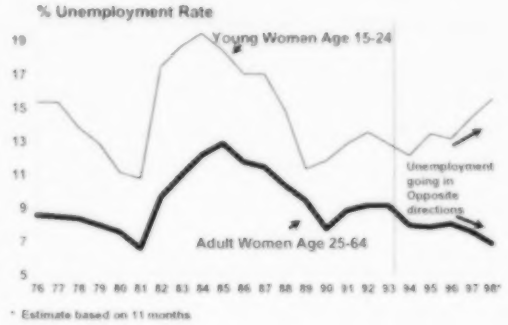
BC Women's Unemployment Rate is at its Lowest In 17 Years



This improvement has occurred alongside a deterioration in the labour market status of men. Between 1997 and 1998, employment levels for men declined causing their unemployment rate to increase by close to a full percentage point.

Not all women improved their labour market circumstances this year. Adult women, those age 25 – 64, have done very well. Their current unemployment rate (6.7%) is close to its lowest level since data became available in 1976. In the last two years, it has declined more than a percentage point from 7.9 to 6.7 per cent.

Since 1994, the Unemployment Rate Gap Between Young and Adult Women Has Increased

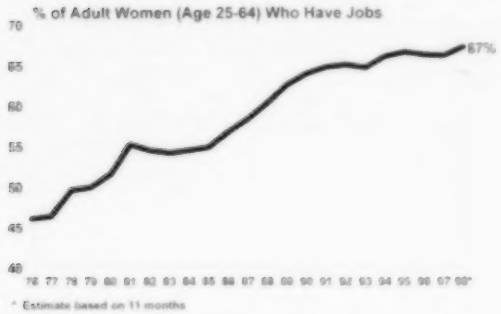


However, young women have not done as well. Their unemployment rate has been increasing since 1993. The 1998 level is estimated at over 15 per cent, a level not seen for 10 years.

Furthermore, for the past four years, the situation for young women has been at odds with that of adult women, a pattern that has not been seen before. Why this divergence is occurring is difficult to explain. Adult women have always had significantly lower unemployment rates than young women, but the two rates would generally move in the same direction and track each other fairly consistently. For many years, the norm was for young women to have an unemployment rate about 1.5 times that of adult woman. But since 1994 that relationship has changed, and is currently running at more than double the rate.

It can be seen from the chart below that adult women (age 25-64) have not only shown improvement in their unemployment numbers but also in their employment rates (percent of adult women with jobs).

The Employment Rate of Adult Women Continues to Climb



* Estimate based on 11 months

Prior to 1990, the upward trend in their employment rate was due to an increasing number of adult women who wanted to work (increasing participation rates). Since then, the participation rate for this group has stabilised. What is now causing the employment rate to rise is that, among those who want to work, more are able to find work (fewer are unemployed). Today, two thirds of all women in this age group have a job, the highest level since 1976 when data first became available.

The following articles have appeared in previous issues of Earnings and Employment Trends.

TITLES OF PREVIOUS ISSUES	ISSUE NUMBER
Labour Market Comparisons – CMA's to rest of BC	98-08
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Who Works Overtime – The Gender Gap	98-04
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Service Producing Industries in BC	97-04
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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Oct 1/98	% change on one year ago
BC	4,021.3	0.9
Canada	30,381.1	0.9
GDP and INCOME		% change on
(BC - at market prices)	1997	one year ago
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *($ millions)*	109,347	3.3
GDP *($ 1992 millions)*	98,201	2.2
GDP *($ 1992 per Capita)*	24,775	0.1
Personal Disposable Income *($ 1992 per Capita)*	16,340	-2.3
TRADE ($ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Oct	2,925	5.1
Merchandise Exports (raw) Oct	2,251	6.3
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Oct	2,735	-3.3
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		% change on
(all items - 1992=100)	Nov '98	one year ago
BC	109.9	0.2
Canada	109.0	1.2
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change on
(seasonally adjusted)	Dec '98	one year ago
Labour Force - BC	2,063	2.6
Employed - BC	1,895	3.1
Unemployed - BC	168	-3.0
		Dec '97
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	8.2	8.6
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	8.0	8.6
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Jan 13/99	Jan 14/98
Prime Business Rate	6.75	6.00
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.40	6.40
- 5 year	6.90	6.85
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Jan 13/99	Jan 14/98
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $	1.5288	1.4345
US $ *(reciprocal of above rate)*	0.6541	0.6971
AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS		% change on
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	Oct '98	one year ago
BC	623.55	1.5
Canada	608.83	2.0

SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Earnings } Statistics Canada

Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

Released this week by BC STATS

- Labour Force Statistics, December 1998

Next week

- Earnings & Employment Trends, Novemb. 1998
- Tourism Room Revenue, September 1998
- Consumer Price Index, December 1998
  1998 Annual Averages !

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